DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 336 695 CG 023 671

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TITLE Crime and the Nation's Households, 1990. Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin.
INSTITUTION Department of Justice, Washington, D.C. Bureau of Justice Statistics.
REPORT NO NCJ-130302
PUB DATE Aug 91
NOTE 9p.
AVAILABLE FROM Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402 (Stock No. 282-055/50015).
PUB TYPE Statistical Data (110) -- Reports - General (140)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Crime; National Surveys; Rape; Statistical Surveys; Stealing; Trend Analysis; *Victims of Crime

ABSTRACT

The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) collects data on crimes that are not reported to the police as well as those that are reported. Because some crimes are difficult or impossible to examine in a general population survey, the NCVS measures only the personal victimizations of rape, robbery, assault, and theft, and the household crimes of theft, burglary, and motor vehicle theft. The percentage of households experiencing a crime has not shown a statistically significant year-to-year increase since the inception of the indicator in 1975. In 1990 white households were less likely to fall victim to a measured crime than black households and households of other races. Households with higher incomes were more susceptible to theft or attempted theft than were lower-income households. In 1990 households in urban areas continued to be the most likely, and those in rural areas continued to be the least likely to be touched by crime. During 1990, as in the four previous years, households in the Northeast were the least vulnerable to crime, while those in the West were the most. In general, the more people in a household, the greater its susceptibility to crime. In 1990, 1 in 14 households in the nation was burglarized or had a member who was the victim of a violent crime committed by a stranger. Black households were not only more vulnerable to crime than white households but were also more likely, if victimized, to report a serious violent crime or a crime of high concern. Population movements and changes in household composition have affected the overall downward trend that the households-victimized-by-crime indicator has shown since 1975. (A discussion of the NCVS methodology is included.) (LLL)

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Bureau of Justice Statistics
Bulletin

ED336695
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Crime and the Nation's Households, 1990

by Michael R. Rand
BJS Statistician

In 1990, 24% of U.S. households were victimized by a rape, robbery, assault, theft, burglary, or motor vehicle theft. This was a decline from the 25% of households that in 1989 experienced a crime measured by the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS). The 1990 percentage is the lowest annual percentage since 1975, the first year for the household indicator, when a third of all households experienced a crime. Until 1990 the proportion of households victimized by crime had remained unchanged for 5 years. A decrease in the percentage of households victimized by theft largely accounted for the overall decline from 1989 to 1990. Each year theft comprises almost two-thirds of the victimizations measured by the NCVS.

The percentage of households victimized by burglary in 1990 remained unchanged from 1989, as did the percentages of households with a member victimized by a rape, robbery, or assault. However, a greater percentage of U.S. households suffered a completed or attempted motor vehicle theft in 1990 (1.9%) than in 1989 (1.6%).

Additional findings for 1990

The 1990 indicator that measures the risk of crime among the Nation's households also revealed the following:

- Five percent of U.S. households had at least one member age 12 or older who was the victim of a violent crime.

Households experiencing selected crimes of violence and theft, 1975-90

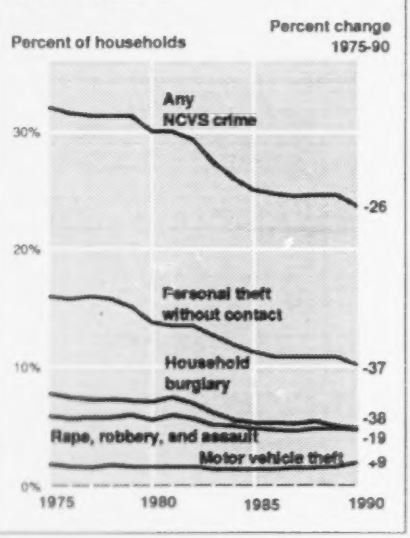

Figure 1

August 1991

With this report, the Bureau of Justice Statistics celebrates the publication of its 100th Bulletin. This Bulletin describes the prevalence of crime among our Nation's households.

We chose this Bulletin as the most opportune time to announce a name change for the *National Crime Survey*, the Nation's second largest ongoing household survey. In the future the survey will be referred to as the **National Crime Victimization Survey** — emphasizing more clearly the measurement of those victimizations experienced by our citizens. The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) will continue to obtain extensive, accurate information about the victims of crime in addition to measuring yearly trends.

Steven D. Dillingham, Ph.D.
Director

Comparison of findings from the National Crime Victimization Survey and the Uniform Crime Reports

The U.S. Department of Justice administers two programs to measure the magnitude, nature, and impact of crime in the United States: the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), the source of this report, and the Uniform Crime Reporting Program (UCR).

Because of differences in methodology and crime coverage, the two programs examine the Nation's crime problem from somewhat different perspectives, and their results are not strictly comparable. The definitional and procedural differences can account for many of the apparent discrepancies in estimates from the two programs. The Department of Justice fact sheet *The Nation's Two Crime Measures* (NCJ-122705) contains a detailed description of the NCVS and UCR.

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• Five percent of all households experienced at least one completed or attempted burglary, and 17%, a completed or attempted theft.

• As in previous years, households with higher incomes (29% of households in the $50,000-or-more category) were more likely to experience a crime than households with less income.

• Households in urban areas (30%) were more likely to experience a measured crime than suburban households (23%) or rural households (17%).

• Twenty-eight percent of both black households and households of other races — Asians, Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans — were victimized by crime, compared to 23% of white households.

• Among the regions, the West continued to have the highest proportion of households touched by crime (28%), while the Northeast had the lowest (20%).

Table 1. Households experiencing crime in 1990, and relative percent change since 1989

Households	1989* Number of households	1989* Percent	1990 Number of households	1990 Percent	Relative percent change, 1989-90
Total	94,553,000	100.0%	95,461,000	100.0%	
Victimized by:					
Any NCVS crime	23,221,000	24.6%	22,652,000	23.7%	-3.4%[a]
Violent crime	4,492,000	4.8	4,478,000	4.7	-1.2
Rape	124,000	.1	104,000	.1	-16.8
Robbery	934,000	1.0	967,000	1.0	2.5
Assault	3,648,000	3.9	3,591,000	3.8	-2.5
Aggravated	1,400,000	1.5	1,287,000	1.3	-8.9
Simple	2,521,000	2.7	2,527,000	2.6	-.7
Total theft	16,671,000	17.6%	15,905,000	16.7%	-5.5%[a]
Personal	10,585,000	11.2	10,042,000	10.5	-6.0[a]
With contact	487,000	.5	548,000	.6	11.5
Without contact	10,218,000	10.8	9,592,000	10.0	-7.0[a]
Household	7,548,000	8.0	7,199,000	7.5	-5.5[b]
Burglary	4,697,000	5.0	4,557,000	4.8	-3.9
Motor vehicle theft	1,553,000	1.6	1,825,000	1.9	16.4[a]
Crimes of high concern (a rape, robbery, or assault by a stranger or a burglary)	6,939,000	7.3%	6,854,000	7.2%	-2.2%

Note: Detail does not add to total or crime subtotals because of overlap in households experiencing various crimes. Relative percent change is based on unrounded figures.
*Estimates for 1989 differ from those published in *Crime and the Nation's Households, 1989*. See *Methodology*.
[a]Change was statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.
[b]Change was statistically significant at the 90% confidence level.

The National Crime Victimization Survey

The NCVS has been an ongoing national survey of crime victims since 1972. The NCVS collects data on crimes that are not reported to the police as well as those that are reported. Because some crimes are difficult or impossible to examine in a general population survey, the NCVS measures only the personal victimizations of rape, robbery, assault, and theft and the household crimes of theft, burglary, and motor vehicle theft. Homicide and commercial crimes are excluded from the household survey. Over the past 15 years this indicator, which reports the proportion of households that experience an attempted or completed crime, has been calculated to estimate the dispersion of crime. (See *Methodology* on page 6 for further discussion of the indicator and of the NCVS.)

A household refers both to a dwelling unit like a house or apartment and to the people who live in it. A household counted as experiencing a crime during the year met one of these criteria:

• It fell victim to a burglary, auto theft, or household theft.

• A household member age 12 or older was raped, robbed, or assaulted.

• A household member age 12 or older experienced a personal theft.

Table 2. Percent of households experiencing crime, by type of crime, 1975-90

Type of crime	Percent of households experiencing crime															
	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989*	1990
Any NCVS crime	32.1%	31.5%	31.3%	31.3%	31.3%	30.0%	30.0%	29.3%	27.4%	26.0%	25.0%	24.7%	24.5%	24.6%	24.6%	23.7%
Violent crime	5.8	5.6	5.7	5.7	5.9	5.5	5.9	5.6	5.1	5.0	4.8	4.7	4.6	4.8	4.8	4.7
Rape	.2	.2	.2	.2	.2	.2	.2	.2	.1	.2	.1	.1	.1	.2	.1	.1
Robbery	1.4	1.2	1.2	1.1	1.2	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.1	1.0	.9	.9	.1	.9	1.0	1.0
Assault	4.5	4.4	4.7	4.6	4.8	4.4	4.7	4.5	4.2	4.1	4.0	3.8	3.8	4.0	3.9	3.8
Personal theft	16.4	16.2	16.3	16.2	15.4	14.2	13.9	13.9	13.0	12.3	11.5	11.2	11.1	11.2	11.2	10.5
Household theft	10.2	10.3	10.2	9.9	10.8	10.4	10.2	9.6	8.9	8.5	8.1	8.0	8.0	7.7	8.0	7.5
Burglary	7.7	7.4	7.2	7.2	7.1	7.0	7.4	6.9	6.1	5.5	5.3	5.3	5.2	5.4	5.0	4.8
Motor vehicle theft	1.8	1.6	1.5	1.7	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.5	1.5	1.6	1.9
Households touched by crime (in millions)	23.377	23.540	23.741	24.277	24.730	24.222	24.863	24.989	23.621	22.806	22.191	22.201	22.404	22.844	23.221	22.652
Households in U.S. (in millions)	73.123	74.528	75.904	77.578	78.964	80.622	82.797	85.178	86.146	87.791	88.852	90.014	91.391	92.892	94.553	95.461

*Estimates for 1989 differ from those published in *Crime and the Nation's Households, 1989*. See *Methodology*.

Trends

The percentage of households experiencing a crime has never shown a statistically significant year-to-year increase since the inception of the indicator in 1975 (table 1, figure 1). From 1975 to 1985 declining percentages of U.S. households were victimized by crime: 32% of all households in 1975 and 25% in 1985. Between 1985 and 1989 the percentage of households touched by crime remained unchanged before decreasing again in 1990 (table 2).

Some segments of the American population have experienced trends that differed from the national trend. For example, between 1986 and 1989 the annual percentage of urban households victimized by a crime rose from 28% to 31% while that for rural households fell from 20% to 17%. In 1990 the percentage of white households experiencing a crime was at the lowest level ever, after being stable between 1985 and 1989 (figure 1).[1] By contrast, black households experienced an increasing likelihood of criminal victimization between 1985 and 1989.

While lower percentages of both white and black households experienced a crime in 1990 than in 1975, black households had a smaller relative decrease than white households. The proportion of black households touched by crime declined by 15% from 1975 to 1990, compared to a 28% decline for white households. The overall difference in the trends for white and black households primarily resulted from differences in trends of theft.

[1]In the NCVS the race of the household is considered to be that of the household head.

1989-90 comparisons

The overall percentage of households touched by crime decreased in 1990 from the previous year. This decline occurred because of a decrease in the percentage of households with at least one member who experienced a personal theft as well as a marginal decrease in the percentage touched by household thefts. The increased percentage of households with motor vehicle thefts in 1990 had minimal effect on the overall estimate. The percentage of households that suffered burglaries or that had members who were victims of violent crime remained unchanged from the level of 1989.

White households, non-Hispanic households, suburban households, those with an income between $7,500 and $14,999, and those in the West were all less vulnerable to crime in 1990 than in 1989.[2] Declines among these categories of households were primarily the result of lower percentages of households experiencing theft. Households with an income between $25,000 and $49,999 were somewhat less likely in 1990 than in 1989 to have been touched by crime.

[2]Vulnerability to crime in general or to a specific type of crime expresses the likelihood of a household of a particular category to have been victimized by a crime. *Vulnerability* is used in comparisons: The likelihood of victimization of a household in one category is compared to that of a household in another category.

All segments of the U.S. population did not share the decreased susceptibility to crime

Table 3. Percent of households experiencing crime, by race and ethnicity of household head, 1990

Percent of households experiencing	Race of household head			Ethnicity of household head	
	White	Black	Other	Non-Hispanic	Hispanic
Any NCVS crime	23.1%	27.8%	27.5%	23.1%	31.3%
Violent crime	4.6%	5.4%	5.5%	4.5%	7.0%
Rape	.1	.1	.1	.1	.2
Robbery	.8	2.2	1.7	.9	2.7
Assault	3.8	3.6	3.9	3.7	4.5
Aggravated	1.3	1.9	1.2	1.3	2.0
Simple	2.7	2.0	2.9	2.6	2.8
Total theft	16.6%	17.0%	18.6%	16.3%	20.9%
Personal	10.5	10.2	12.9	10.4	11.9
Household	7.4	8.4	7.3	7.3	10.9
Burglary	4.3	7.9	5.6	4.7	6.2
Motor vehicle theft	1.7	3.2	2.3	1.7	4.7
Serious violent crime[a]	2.2%	3.8%	2.9%	2.2%	4.6%
Crimes of high concern[b]	6.7%	10.3%	8.8%	6.9%	10.5%

Note: Detail does not add to total or crime subtotals because of overlap in households experiencing various crimes.

[a]Rape, robbery, or aggravated assault.
[b]A rape, robbery, or assault by a stranger or a burglary.

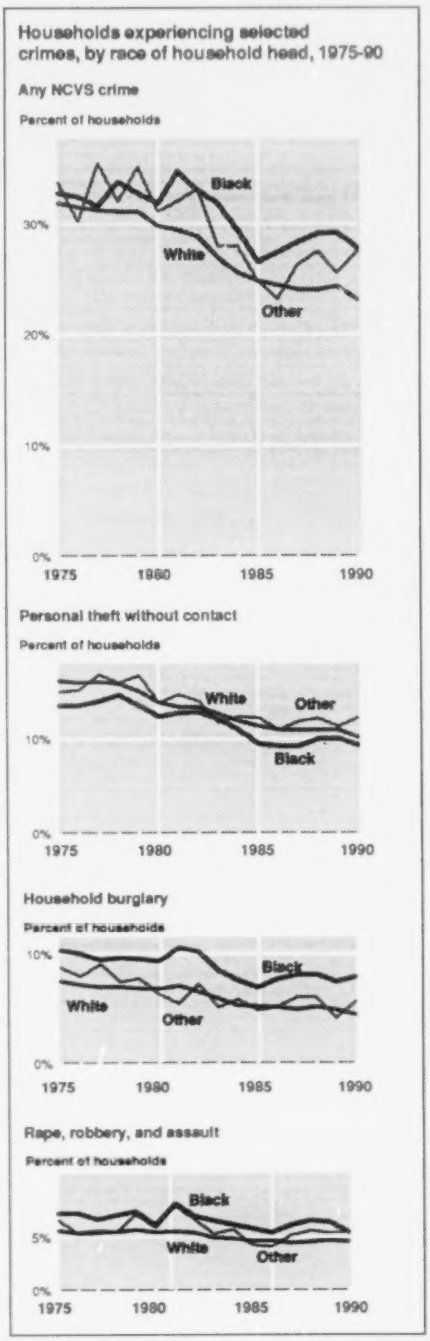

Figure 2

in 1990. Black households, Hispanic households, urban and rural households, and households outside the West were about as likely to sustain a crime in 1990 as in 1989. Even though urban households were less victimized by crimes of theft in 1990 than in 1989, the overall susceptibility of urban households remained unchanged. Midwestern households were as likely to experience crime in 1990 as in 1989, despite a slight decline in the percentage of theft victims among them. Households in income categories other than those noted above experienced no change in their susceptibility to criminal victimization from 1989 to 1990.

Because of reduced victimization from theft, two-to-three-person households were less likely to experience a crime in 1990 than in 1989. This size category includes almost half of the Nation's households. One-person households and households with more than three members had no decrease in the level of crime. In households of four to five people, a marginal decrease in the percentage experiencing theft did not cause a significant overall decrease in the percentage of such households experiencing crime.

Race and ethnicity of household

In 1990 white households were less likely to fall victim to a measured crime than black households and households of other races (table 3). A higher percentage of black households than white households suffered a robbery, aggravated assault, or motor vehicle theft. Black households were also slightly more vulnerable to household theft than white households. Burglary affected a higher percentage of black households than households of whites or other races.

White households were more likely than black households to have a member victimized by simple assault. White, black, and other race households had similar percentages of crimes of theft overall, although other race households were slightly more likely than white or black households to have a member who was the victim of a personal theft during 1990.

Proportionately more Hispanic households than non-Hispanic households suffered a crime. Almost 3% of Hispanic households in 1990 experienced a robbery, compared to about 1% of non-Hispanic households. Hispanic households were also more likely than their non-Hispanic counterparts to experience theft, 21% versus 16%. Larger percentages of Hispanic households than non-Hispanic households sustained a burglary or motor vehicle theft.

Family income

Households with higher incomes were more susceptible to theft or attempted theft than were lower-income households (table 4). Households with incomes of at least $50,000 were more than 1 1/2 times as likely to experience a personal theft as households with incomes below $7,500.

In general, as income increased, the percentage of households with members victimized by personal theft increased.

Assaults occurred in similar proportions at all household income levels except for a slight difference between the highest and the lowest income households. Despite this similarity in victimization by assault, households with incomes below $7,500 experienced violent crimes to a greater extent than did other households.

Households with incomes under $7,500 were more likely than higher income households to experience burglary but less likely than households with incomes above $15,000 to be victimized by motor vehicle theft.

Place of residence

In 1990 households in urban areas continued to be the most likely and those in rural areas continued to be the least likely to be touched by crime. For all but two of the crimes measured, the percentage of suburban households victimized by crime fell between that of urban and rural households. Suburban and rural households did not differ measurably in the percentages victimized by burglary or aggravated assault. In 1990, 1 in 56 urban households had a member who was the victim of a robbery, compared with 1 in 137 suburban households and 1 in 225 rural households.

Table 4. Percent of households experiencing crime, by selected characteristics, 1990

Percent of households experiencing:	Annual household income					Place of residence[a]			Region			
	Under $7,500	$7,500-$14,999	$15,000-$24,999	$25,000-$49,999	$50,000 or more	Urban	Suburban	Rural	North-east	Mid-west	South	West
Any NCVS crime	22.6%	21.0%	23.7%	24.7%	28.6%	29.6%	22.7%	16.9%	19.8%	23.0%	24.3%	27.9%
Violent crime	5.9%	4.9%	4.9%	4.4%	4.3%	6.1%	4.2%	3.6%	3.8%	4.6%	4.8%	5.5%
Rape	.2	.1	.2	.1	--	.2	.1	.1	.1	.1	.1	.2
Robbery	1.7	1.1	1.0	.7	.8	1.8	.7	.4	1.4	.8	1.0	1.0
Assault	4.4	3.8	3.9	3.8	3.5	4.4	3.5	3.2	2.5	4.0	3.9	4.6
Aggravated	1.7	1.5	1.4	1.3	1.0	1.7	1.2	1.2	.8	1.3	1.6	1.7
Simple	3.2	2.5	2.7	2.7	2.6	3.0	2.6	2.2	1.8	3.0	2.6	3.2
Total theft	14.4%	13.9%	16.6%	17.8%	21.5%	20.3%	16.5%	11.6%	13.3%	16.6%	17.0%	19.9%
Personal	8.3	8.2	10.1	11.5	15.1	12.4	10.9	6.9	8.7	10.6	10.6	12.4
Household	7.5	6.9	7.9	7.8	7.8	9.9	6.8	5.5	5.3	7.4	7.9	9.5
Burglary	6.7	5.0	4.7	4.1	4.7	6.7	3.9	3.7	3.3	4.5	5.5	5.4
Motor vehicle theft	1.3	1.6	2.0	2.1	2.2	2.9	1.8	0.7	2.5	1.3	1.8	2.2
Serious violent crime[b]	3.4%	2.7%	2.4%	2.0%	1.8%	3.5%	1.9%	1.7%	2.1%	2.1%	2.5%	2.7%
Crimes of high concern[c]	9.0%	7.3%	7.3%	6.5%	7.2%	10.1%	6.1%	5.0%	5.5%	6.8%	7.7%	8.5%

Note: Detail does not add to total because of overlap in households experiencing various crimes.
--Too few cases to obtain a statistically reliable estimate.
[a]These estimates are not comparable to estimates for place of residence prior to 1986 because of changes in geographic classification (see footnote 3).
[b]Rape, robbery, or aggravated assault.
[c]A rape, robbery, or assault by a stranger or a burglary.

Region

During 1990, as in the 4 previous years, households in the Northeast were the least vulnerable to crime (20%), while those in the West were the most (28%). Households in the South (24%) were slightly more vulnerable to crime than those in the Midwest (23%).

There were few exceptions to this pattern of lower likelihood of criminal victimization for households in the Northeast and greater likelihood for households in the West. Northeastern households were the most vulnerable to robbery and were more likely than Southern or Midwestern households to have a completed or attempted motor vehicle theft. Western households were about as likely as Southern households to experience a burglary or a motor vehicle theft. Western, Southern, and Midwestern households had about the same likelihood to have a member to suffer an aggravated assault. Members of Western and Midwestern households were almost equally as likely to experience simple assault.

Size of household

In general, the more people in a household, the greater its susceptibility to crime (table 5). This tendency is more pronounced for personal crimes than for household crimes because larger households have more members at risk for personal crimes, but each household, regardless of size, is at risk for household crimes.

The likelihood of personal crime victimization generally does not increase at a rate proportional to increases in household size. For example, in 1990, as in previous years, the percentage of six-or-more-person households touched by personal theft was about 2 1/2 times that of one-person households.

Table 5. Percent of households touched by selected crimes, by size of household, 1990

Percent of households experiencing:	Number of persons in household			
	1	2-3	4-5	6+
Any NCVS crime	17.4%	23.0%	30.8%	38.9%
Violent crime	3.0%	4.3%	6.8%	10.7%
Total theft	11.1	16.4	22.1	27.7
Personal	7.0	10.4	14.0	16.9
Household	4.8	7.3	10.2	14.3
Burglary	4.6	4.5	5.5	5.8
Motor vehicle theft	1.5	1.8	2.5	3.1

For various reasons, the rate of victimization by personal crime is not simply proportional to household size. Many households with two or more members have children under age 12. Crimes against young children are not included in the NCVS measurement of crime victimization.[3] In addition, variations in demographic characteristics and lifestyles among different size households can affect their likelihood of criminal victimization.

The relationship between household size and susceptibility to crime shown in past years also held for 1990:

- Fewer than 1 in 5 single-person households were touched by crime, compared with 2 in 5 households with six or more persons.
- Households with six or more members were about 4 times more likely than single-person households to have had at least one member who was victimized by violent crime (11% versus 3%) and 2 1/2 times more likely to have sustained a personal or household theft (28% versus 11%).

As in previous years, burglary varied the least among households of different sizes. In 1990, 5% of single-person households were burglarized, compared to 6% of households with six or more members.

Crimes of high concern

In 1990, 1 in 14 households in the Nation were burglarized or had a member who was the victim of a violent crime (rape, robbery, or assault) committed by a stranger. These crimes, which many people consider the most threatening, have been designated *crimes of high concern* in this report.

In 1990 households with incomes under $7,500 and urban households were the most likely to have been victimized by crimes of high concern. A higher percentage of black households than white households experienced at least one crime of high concern, and a higher percentage of Hispanic households sustained such crimes than did non-Hispanic households (figure 3). By region, the percentage of households experiencing a crime of high concern was highest in the West and lowest in the Northeast.

[3]Crimes against children under age 12 are excluded from the NCVS because asking sensitive questions about victimization might be stressful to the child or the parents, possibly discouraging adult participation in the survey.

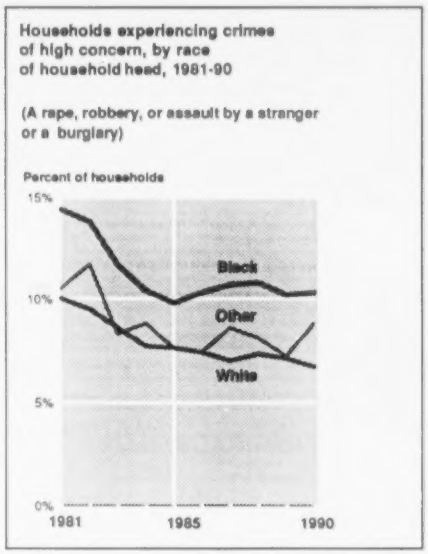

Figure 3

From 1981, when 11% of all households experienced a crime of high concern, until 1985, when 8% of all households were so victimized, the percentage of households victimized by such crime decreased yearly. Between 1985 and 1988, the percentage did not change measurably but declined again in 1989 to 7%. The percentage in 1990 remained at that lowest level — 7%.

Race and crime seriousness

In 1990 black households were not only more vulnerable to crime than white households but were also more likely, if victimized, to report a serious violent crime or a crime of high concern. In 1990, 14% of the black households experiencing any crime had a member victimized by a rape, robbery, or aggravated assault, while 9% of victimized white households had a member who suffered one of these crimes. Similarly, among those households that fell victim to a crime in 1990, 37% of black households and 29% of white households were victimized by crimes of high concern.

Factors affecting trends

Population movements and changes in household composition have affected the overall downward trend that the households-victimized-by-crime indicator has shown since 1975.

American society is extremely mobile. For some time the population has been moving away from the Northeast and Midwest into

the South and West. Urban residents have been moving to suburban and rural areas. In 1975, 50% of the U.S. population lived in the Northeast or Midwest, compared to 44% in 1990. Between 1975 and 1985 the percentage of households located in urban areas fell from 32% to 29% of all households, while suburban and rural households increased from 68% to 71%. After 1986 urban households continued to account for a declining percentage of all households, and suburban households, an increasing one.[4]

People are constantly moving into and out of different households, creating new households, and merging existing households. During the period 1975 to 1990, the average size of the American household decreased. One-person households represented 21% of all households in 1975 but 25% in 1990. The percentage of households consisting of six or more persons fell from 7% to 3%.

Two population movements outlined above, changing household size and household location, have shifted population from households more likely to experience crime — larger ones and those in urban areas — to those less likely — smaller ones and those in suburban or rural areas. Another movement has shifted the population in the opposite direction, from the Northeast, a region with a lower likelihood of crime, to the West, where a higher proportion of households experience crime.

While current data do not permit measurement of the degree to which all population movements have affected the indicator, estimates can be made for the effect of changes in household size. If the size distribution of American households were the same in 1990 as in 1975, the estimate of households experiencing crime would have been 24.7% rather than 23.7%.[5] This adjusted estimate, however, is still significantly below the 1975 estimate of 32% of households victimized by crime.

Methodology

The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) developed the households-victimized-by-crime indicator in 1981 to improve our understanding of the impact of crime on our society.[6] The household was chosen as the unit of analysis because crimes such as burglary are crimes against an entire household and crimes against persons affect members of the victim's household.

Crimes not included in the NCVS

Households-victimized-by-crime estimates are derived from NCVS statistics on rape, personal robbery, assault, household burglary, personal and household theft, and motor vehicle theft.[7] Because the NCVS counts only crimes for which the victim can be interviewed, homicide is not counted. Its exclusion does not noticeably affect the estimates. If each of the homicides during 1990 had occurred in a different household and if these households had been victimized by no other crime (the largest possible effect), then the inclusion of homicides in these findings would not have raised the overall percent of households victimized by crime (23.7%) by as much as 0.05%.[8]

Other crimes against persons or their households, such as fraud, confidence games, kidnaping, and arson are not included in this analysis because they are not measured by the NCVS. Commercial crimes, drug trafficking, and drug possession crimes also are not included.

Rates of crime — number of crimes per 1,000 persons or households

Traditional measures of crime are in the form of volumes or rates. Data on the volume of crime have limited usefulness because the size of the population is not taken into account. Rates — expressed in the NCVS as crimes per 1,000 households or per 1,000 persons — automatically correct for different population sizes. Rates based on the individual person or household, however, give only one measure of how common a crime is. Because crimes against individuals are likely to affect everyone with whom they reside, another estimate of whether crime is widely spread or highly concentrated is to measure its occurrence in households with different characteristics.

Households-victimized-by-crime indicator

For each type of crime examined, a household is counted only once, regardless of how many times that household was victimized. For example, if a household were burglarized twice and one of its members were robbed once during the year, it is counted once for households sustaining burglary even though it was victimized twice by burglary. It is also counted once for households victimized by robbery. Finally, it is counted once in the overall measure, households victimized by crime.

Consequently, the households-victimized-by-crime estimate for 1990 (23.7%) is less than the sum of the estimates for households victimized by personal crimes (14.0%) and those victimized by household crimes (13.1%) because 2.2% of U.S. households were victims of both personal and household crimes. Similarly, because about 1.2% of U.S. households experience both personal theft and violence, the sum of households victimized by personal theft (10.5%) and those victimized by violence (4.7%) exceeds the estimate of those victimized by personal crime (14.0%).

All data in this Bulletin are from the NCVS except those specifically attributed to other sources. The NCVS is an ongoing survey conducted for BJS by the Bureau of the Census. Interviews are conducted at 6-month intervals with all occupants age 12 or older in about 49,000 housing units (99,000 persons). Because the NCVS does not obtain information about crimes against persons under age 12, households experiencing only such crimes are not included in the estimate of households victimized by crime.

Revisions to prior year estimates

Estimates of the percentage of households affected by crime for 1987 and 1989 vary from those published in *Households Touched by Crime, 1987* and *Crime and the Nation's Households, 1989*, respectively.

In 1987 the NCVS conducted a preliminary test on 5% of the sample using computer-assisted-telephone interviewing (CATI). In CATI an interviewer enters responses directly into a computer rather than on a printed form. Data from the CATI experiment were excluded from estimates until the effects of the change in procedure were known.

[4] Places of residence for 1986 through 1990 are based on 1980 census definitions, and earlier years are based on 1970 census definitions. Hence, the places of residence and population distributions identified in the two periods 1975-85 and 1986-90 were not directly comparable.

[5] This analysis assumes that in each category of household size the percentage of households victimized by crime in 1990 would be unchanged, given the size distribution for all households that existed in 1975.

[6] *The Prevalence of Crime*, BJS Bulletin, NCJ-75905, April 1981.

[7] These crimes are defined in *Measuring Crime*, BJS Bulletin, NCJ-75710, February 1981. As used in this report, the term "theft" is synonymous with the term "larceny" used in previous reports. The NCVS was formerly named the National Crime Survey (NCS).

[8] Preliminary estimates for 1990 indicate that homicides increased by 10% from the 21,500 that occurred in 1989 (Federal Bureau of Investigation, Uniform Crime Reports, 1991).

Subsequent to the publication of *Crime and the Nation's Households, 1989*, Census Bureau programmers discovered that a weighting adjustment was inadvertently omitted from the processing to produce the 1989 crime prevalence estimates. In general, the effect of the error was a slight overestimate of the percentage of households touched by crime for the Nation and for most population groups. Comparison of the corrected 1989 estimates with published estimates did not uncover any substantive change.

Estimates of standard errors

The estimates in this Bulletin are derived from sample survey data, and they are subject to sampling variation.[9] Because the procedure used to produce estimates of households sustaining crime differs from that for victimization rates, the households-victimized data have standard errors about 8% higher than those for victimization rates with the same population bases, even though they are derived from the same sample survey.

Comparisons presented in this report were determined to be statistically significant at the 95% confidence level, meaning that the estimated difference is greater than twice the standard error. Statements of comparison qualified by language such as "slightly", "somewhat," or "marginal" indicate statistical significance at the 90% level (1.6 standard errors). The estimates are also subject to response errors, including crimes that are forgotten or withheld from the interviewer. Such response errors tend to cause understated counts of households victimized by crime.[10]

[9]Details of the NCVS sample design, the standard error computation, and the customary estimation procedure for victimization rates and counts may be found in *Criminal Victimization in the United States, 1989*, NCJ-129391, December 1990, appendix III.

[10]A more detailed description of the procedures used to estimate households victimized by crime appears in an unpublished memorandum prepared by the U.S. Bureau of the Census. The memorandum is available from Michael Rand, c/o Bureau of Justice Statistics, 633 Indiana Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20531, telephone (202) 616-3494.

Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletins are prepared by BJS staff under the direction of Michael Agopian, deputy director. This report was written by Michael R. Rand. Tom Hester edited it. Marilyn Marbrook, publications unit chief, administered report production, assisted by Tina Dorsey, Betty Sherman, Priscilla Middleton, Yvonne Boston, and Jayne Pugh.

August 1991, NCJ-130302

The Assistant Attorney General, Office of Justice Programs, coordinates the activities of the following program offices and bureaus: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Institute of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and Office for Victims of Crime.

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